

Circle F Farms-Grazing into the Future

David Fourquarean, Trigg County

Circle F Farms is a family operation located in Gracey, Ky roughly consisting of 325 acres of farmland. 120 acres are rented out for row crop production, 130 acres of pasture that are rotationally grazed with the balance in woods. The family operation is a partnership of John, David and John David Fourquarean. John David's 3 kids will be the 6th generation to operate this farm. We run around 60 pairs on 2 different farms, 10 minutes apart. Steer calves are marketed through CPH or private treating sales off the farm. Heifer calves are marketed through the Guthrie bred heifer sale those that do not make the cut are sold at the CPH sale. There are a few bulls that are marketed privately from some purebred gelbvieh cows. The cows are all bred one round of AI to Simmental or Gelbvieh bulls and cleaned up with Balancer bulls. The cows are mostly Gelbvieh/Angus cross, average cow weight is 1,315 lbs. Average weaning weight on 9/26/21 was 625 lbs. on steers and heifers calved mostly in late Jan-early March.



Figure 1. The Fourquarean family. Standing left to right: Ella, John David, Abby and Keeton and Sitting: David, Reid, Clayton and Jodi.

We started utilizing Strategic Winter Feeding in 2007 to match forage resources with cow needs during the winter months. Cows are put in dry lots or sacrifice pastures by September 15th and kept there until the mid to late December (Hay averages over the past 14 years 10% protein and 51% TDN), then the farms are strip grazed until April starting at the water sources and grazing outward. Most fields depending on layout are divided into at least 3 paddocks. The cows are usually given enough grass to last 3 days. This is the first year we have not applied Nitrogen for fall stockpiled grass however cows were pulled the 20th of August due to no pasture (localized drought conditions), no nitrogen applied (due to cost of N) and as of today we have a tremendous amount of stockpiled grass. We have had many timely rains since August and ideal growing conditions to promote growth. When stockpiled grass is not abundant, we still strip graze, we will just unroll hay to get the cows to stay in each paddock for the required timeframe.

Note: No 2 years have been the same since we started, every year has been different, and we have had to use a different strategy. Strategic Winter Feeding is very flexible and adaptable to lots of different scenarios.

We also utilize summer annuals (mainly Sorghum Sudan grass) used in dry lots, barn runs and fields with thin stands of fescue (sacrifice pasture). In thin stands, pasture is grazed down close and Sorghum Sudan grass is No tilled at a rate of at least 45-50 lbs./acre. We top-dress with 50 units of N. I have found that at lower seeding rates the Sorghum Sudan grass will not compete with the fescue as it regrows. Also, if it is planted in 4+ inch fescue the Sorghum Sudan grass will never compete, and you will only have a partial stand. As the grazing season progresses the Sorghum Sudan grass will thin itself out until frost. I have grazed these fields as many as 5 times during the summer grazing season after planting in mid-May. We utilize this strategy so as not to eliminate fescue and orchardgrass until we are ready to completely reseed pasture. This is a great forage for cows, they had great condition and you can break-up the fescue toxicity problem during late summer, however the calves did not perform like I thought they might with the amount of Sorghum Sudan grass available to them when we took weaning weights. We also use Annual Ryegrass in the fall to plant in those same fields to graze starting in early to late February. All first calf heifers are turned out on Marshall Ryegrass after calving and supplemented with feed until after breeding. Our biggest challenge with these annuals is getting them planted in a timely fashion to capitalize on their production cycle.

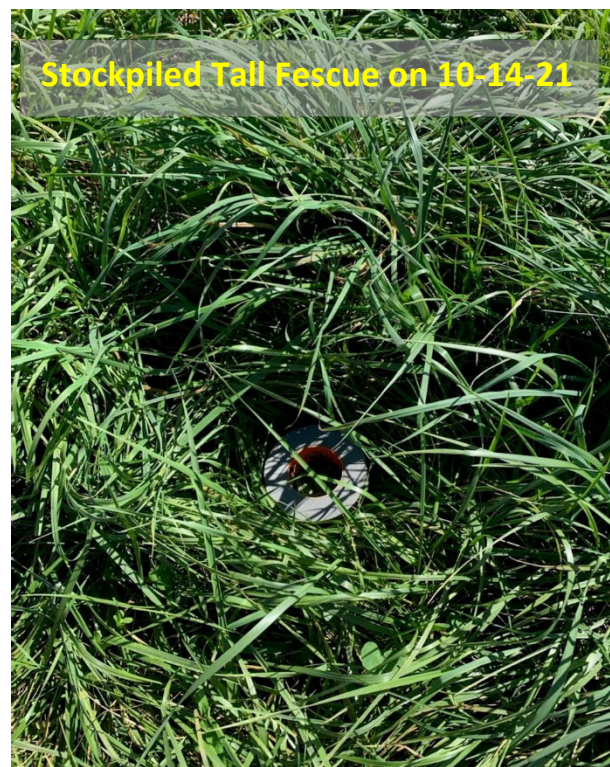


Figure 2. Hay is stored under cover and fed starting in September until late December. This allows tall fescue pasture to be stockpiled for winter grazing. Stockpile is then grazed starting in late December using strip grazing with three-day allocations.

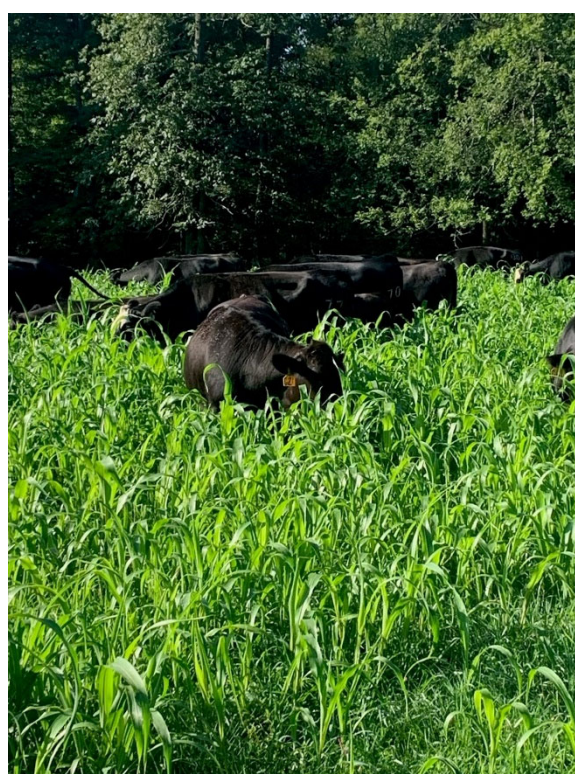
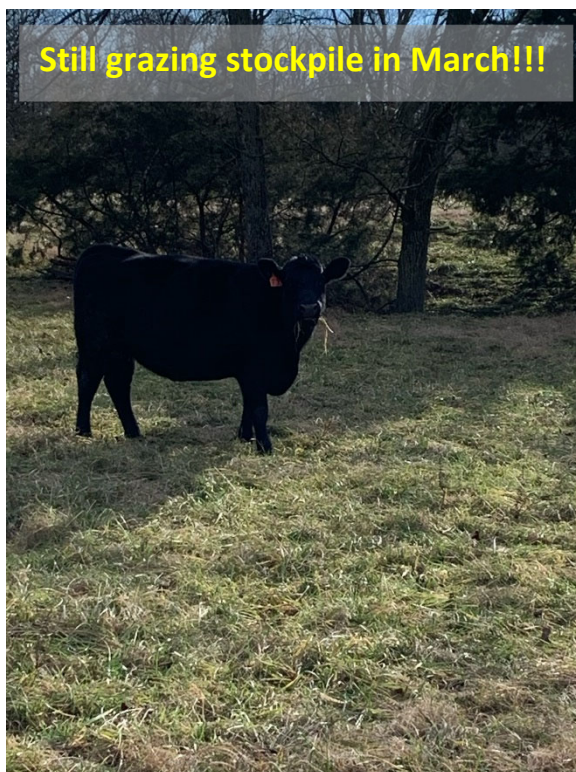


Figure 3. Cows grazing stockpiled grass after strategic hay feeding from September to December (top right and left). Warm-season annuals are utilized to provide high quality grazing during the summer months (bottom right and left).

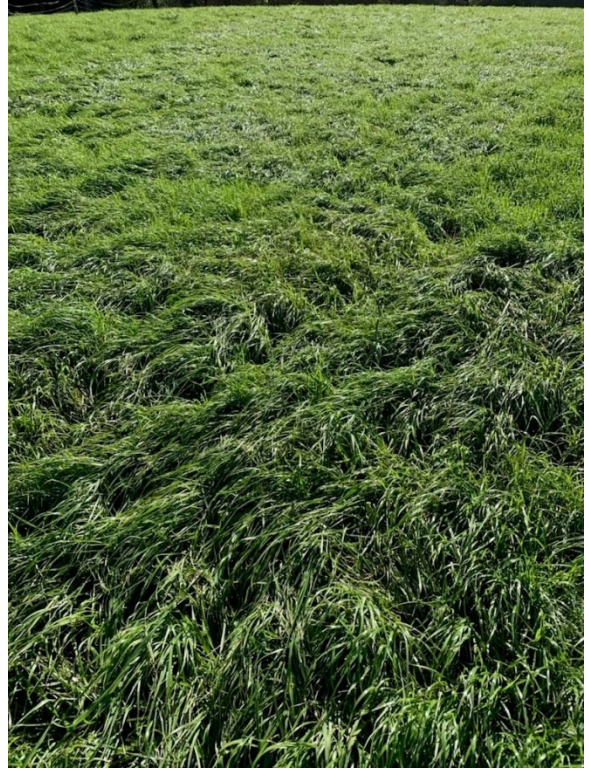


Figure 4. Following summer grazing, sorghum-sudangrass fields (left) are planted to annual ryegrass (right) to provide late fall and spring grazing.